DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 765 CG 016 171

AUTHOR Canada, Richard M.; And Others
TITLE What the Secondary Counselor Should Know about College Student Attrition.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (Detroit, MI, March 17-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; College Bound Students; *College Students; Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Role; *Dropout Prevention; Dropout Research; Higher Education; Literature Reviews; Predictor Variables; *School Counselors; Secondary Education; *Student Attrition; Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This article reviews the literature on university student attrition and comments on general implications for secondary school counselors. The reasons that dropouts leave school are assessed, e.g., lack of interaction with faculty, a perceived lack of progress, and financial/family problems; and characteristics of non-returning students are identified, e.g., low academic ability and lack of motivation to be in school. The role of the secondary counselor in identifying potential dropouts and offering appropriate services to the student prior to college attendance is discussed. Examples of specific counseling techniques are given along with remedial actions which may increase the student's odds of a successful college career. The importance of an appropriate selection of a college campus is also discussed. (JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED220765

WHAT THE SECONDARY COUNSELOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE STUDENT ATTRITION

Richard M. Canada

Janey Holcomb Patty

Edward Wilson

University of Montevallo
Alabama

CG 016171

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard M. Canada

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WHAT THE SECONDARY COUNSELOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE STUDENT ATTRITION

The 1980's are relatively lucrative times in which to be a potential college student. Because the decline in the number of potential college students will continue, competition for potential students, especially academically talented ones, will be keen. Consequently it is increasingly significant that only half or less of the entering college freshmen will receive a Bachelor's degree after four years (Cope and Hannah, 1975). Secondary school counselors, however, are in a unique position to ensure that prospective college students have an improved chance of success in college. The purpose of this article, is to review the literature on university attrition and comment on general implications for secondary school counselors.

Reviewing the Literature

In terms of the scope and size of the college attrition problem there seems to be considerable agreement. Historically, the attrition rate has been approximately 30 percent of the enrollment in American colleges and universities (Cope and Hannah, 1975; Jackson and McMillan, 1977; Pantages and Creedon, 1978). Cope and Hannah's research (1975) revealed that Bachelor's degrees are obtained by only 40-50 percent of entering students after four years and later by another 20-30 percent, and never obtained by the remaining 30-40 percent.

An extensive amount of the literature in the area of attrition deals with identifying dropouts and assessing their reasons for leaving school.

These reasons include: (1) lack of informal interaction with faculty and/or administrators (Kegan, 1978; Noel, 1976; Pascarella and Terenzeni, 1977; Peng and Fetters, 1978), (2) disappointment in program of study or in student's perception of progress toward desired academic and/or career goals (Jackson and McMillan, 1977; Schell, 1978; Steele, 1975), (3) financial problems (Demitroff, 1974; Jackson & McMillan, 1977; Reichard and McArver, 1976; Schell, 1978; Womack and McCluskey, 1975), (4) family problems (Jackson & McMillan, 1977; Reichard and McArver, 1976), (5) changes in or indecision with vocational goals (Demitroff, 1974; Schell, 1978), (6) lack of advising (Kegan, 1978; Timmons, 1977), (7) disappointment in quality of instruction (Noel, 1976), (8) transfer to another institution (Reichard and McArver, 1976; Stine, 1977; Womack and McCluskey, 1975), (9) full-time employment and (10) personal reasons (Stine, 1977; Womack and McCluskey, 1975). In summary the literature does not reveal a clear-cut set of identifiers or reasons for leaving a particular school. Attrition is, according to McDermott (1975), multicausal and not completely explainable.

Although one single cause for college attrition does not stand out in the literature it is possible to find some agreement on characteristics of non returning students. For example, academic standing was found to be a predictor of attrition in five of the research studies reviewed. Past (pre-college) academic performance (Demitroff, 1974; McDermott, 1975), college grade point average (Lanning, 1977; Pedrini and Pedrini, 1977), and poor study habits (Demitroff, 1974; Timmons, 1977) were also found to be important academic predictors of attrition. It appears from these data that dropouts often have lower academic abilities and/or rankings than do students who remain in college.

On some characteristics listed in the literature there was considerable disagreement. Race was discussed in several studies as a factor in attrition. Jackson and McMillan (1977) found that blacks withdraw more often than whites, and in Stine's (1977) research 60 percent of the withdrawers were of non-Caucasian background. Although these studies suggest that blacks have a higher rate of attrition than whites, Peng and Fetters (1977) found the reverse to be true if other variables were controlled.

The literature was also divided as to whether gender was an important characteristic of the typical dropout. Stine (1977) and Chase (1977) found that female students were more likely to drop out than male students, while in two other studies no difference was found between sexes (Schell, 1978; Cope and Hannah, 1975).

In describing dropouts in regard to age and classification there appears to be some agreement in the literature. Younger students withdraw at a higher rate than older students (Jackson and McMillan, 1977) and seniors are less likely to withdraw than those in other classes (Schell, 1978).

It was found that students who lack motivation to be in school have higher rates of attrition than do other more motivated students (Demitroff, 1974; Kegan, 1978; Peng and Fetters, 1977). Related to this, Noel (1976) discovered that dropouts often are not involved in extracurricular activities; while Demitroff (1974) and Womack and McClusky (1975) found that dropouts are more likely than continuers to have an undecided major. In addition, Schell (1978) found in his research that Arts and Sciences majors are more likely to withdraw than are students with professional studies majors.

In summary the predictive descriptors found in this literature review which describe the average college dropout are: he/she usually has lower academic ability and/or ranking (McDermott, 1975; Lanning, 1977; Pedrini and Pedrini, 1977; Demitroff, 1974), has poor study habits (Demitroff, 1974; Timmons, 1977), is a younger student with less than senior status (Jackson and McMillan, 1977; Schell, 1978), and has not decided on a major (Womack and McCluskey, 1975; Demitroff, 1974).

Conclusions

When dealing with the above literature it is difficult to make generalizations because of the diversity of both predictors and reasons for university attrition. Fortunately, in this case, the secondary school counselor works with individuals which makes it much easier to deal with inconsistencies found in the literature. The task of the secondary counselor is to identify potential college dropouts and offer the appropriate services prior to the student entering college.

In order to identify the potential college dropout the secondary counselor need only look at the predictive descriptors listed in the above literature review; low academic ability, poor study habits, younger students, and lack of a college major choice (lack of a stated goal). Once the potential college dropout is identified then the secondary counselor has an obligation to offer services directly related to the recognized need. If a student is identified as being academically weak then remediation might include such things as teaching study skills, advising the student about relative chances of success in college (especially when predictors such as ACT and PSAT information are available), and/or helping the student select a college which has a viable study skills program. Secondary

school counselors might also make direct referrals to individuals who can offer such help within the university the student selects.

For the undecided major the secondary counselor might offer special educational and/or vocational counseling, advise the student that being undecided may affect motivation to achieve, and assist the student in selecting a college campus that offers pro-active help to undecided majors. It also would be helpful to advise the undecided major that most college students change majors at least once and that they will probably change vocations several times during their work career.

Finally, the potential college dropout is one who, according to Noel (1976), will not have a contact with a professional adult on the college campus. Secondary counselors can assist these students to take the risk of seeking out significant others in their college environment. Counselors may serve as a liaison and personally introduce prospective students to college recruiters, faculty members, and others they know on the prospective campus. They may also advise students toward college campuses that offer a comprehensive orientation program.

In summary, then, some college attrition is predictable; however, many students may have their odds for a successful college experience improved by an informed and sensitive secondary school counselor.

It is significant that potential college dropouts can be identified prior to entering college and that identification can dictate appropriate secondary counselor responses. In reviewing these suggestions for responses it might be noted here that one of the recurrent themes is for the secondary counselor to assist the student in selecting a college campus that meets his/her individual needs.

While appropriate selection of a college campus may be the single most important thing a counselor can do to affect college student attrition, as indicated earlier a variety of other responses may be used. Pro-active counseling directed toward predictable developmental problems is almost always the most efficient and effective way to improve the quality of life for students.

REFERENCES

Chase, Clinton, et.al. "Persistence and conditions related to it." Indiana Studies in Prediction No. 32, Bureau of Education Studies and Development, Indiana University, November, 1976 in College Student Personnel Abstracts, Vol. 12, No. 4, Summer, 1977, p. 439.

Cope, R. and Hannah, W. Revolving college doors: The cause and consequences of dropping out, stopping out, and transferring. New York: John Wiley, 1975.

Demitroff, John F. "Student persistence - An institutional approach." College and University, Vol. 49, 1974 (Summer), p. 553-567.

Jackson, Edison O. and McMillan, Robert L. "Study of attrition: Non-returning students for 1975-1976." Essex County College, Newark, N.J., 1977. (ED 136 861)

Kegan, Daniel L. "The quality of student life and financial costs: The cost of social isolation." Journal of College Student Personnel, 19, 1978 (January), pp. 55-58.

Lanning, Wayne. "Factors related to college student persistence and withdrawal." NASPA Journal, Vol. 15, 1977 (Fall), pp. 34-38.

McDermott, Marie. "Towards a comprehensive plan to increase Hofstra's retention rate: A review of the literature." Abstracts and reviews of research in higher education, No. 19, 1975. (ED 104 274)

Noel, Lee. "College student retention: A campus-wide responsibility." National ACAC Journal, 21, 1976 (July), pp. 33-36.

Pantages, Timothy J. and Creedon, Carol F. "Studies of college attrition: 1950-1975." Review of Educational Research, Vol. 48, No. 1, 1978, pp. 49-101.

Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. "Patterns of student-faculty informal interaction beyond the classroom and voluntary freshman attrition." Journal of Higher Education, 48, 1977 (5), pp. 540-552.

Pedrini, Bonnie C. and Pedrini, D.T. "Predicting attrition/persistence of college freshmen: Disadvantaged and regular." 1977. (ED 132 205)

Peng, Samuel S. and Fetters, William B. "College Student Withdrawal: A motivational problem." Research Triangle Institute, Durham, N.C., April, 1977. (ED 148 206)

Peng, S. S. and Fetters, W.B. "Variables involved in withdrawal during the first two years of college: Preliminary findings from the national longitudinal study of the high school class of 1972." American Education Research Journal, 15, 1978 (Summer), pp. 361-372.

Reichard, Donald J. and McArver, Patricia P. "Survey of non-returning students." University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1976. (ED 125 489)

Schell, Robert E. "Reasons for voluntarily withdrawing from the State University at Oswego." State University of New York, Oswego College, 1978. (ED 152 142)

Steele, Matt W. "The correlates of undergraduate student attrition at the University of Miami." Unpublished Report, University of Miami, March, 1975. (ED 095 784)

Stine, Vance. "Some characteristics of students who withdrew from LACC Spring, 1976; Spring, 1975; Spring, 1974; Spring, 1973. Research Study No. 77-9." Los Angeles City College, California, July, 1977. (ED 140 876)

Timmons, Frank R. "Freshman withdrawal from college: An empirical examination of the usefulness of 'Autopsy Studies.'" Psychological Reports, Vol. 41, 1977 (October), pp. 672-674.

Womack, Farris and McCluskey, Jimmy. "Characteristics and perceptions of non-returning students at Arkansas State University, Spring, 1973." 1975. (ED 101 606)